

Information on:

Large loop excision of the transformation zone (LLETZ)

Jo's cervical
cancer trust



jostrust.org.uk



Large loop excision of the transformation zone (LLETZ)

This booklet covers:

- What is LLETZ?
- What happens during LLETZ?
- Will I feel ok after LLETZ?
- What can I do or not do after LLETZ?
- Follow-up treatment after LLETZ treatment

What is LLETZ?

A large loop excision of the transformation zone (LLETZ) treatment removes abnormal cells from the cervix. It is usually performed if the results of a cervical screening test (smear test) or colposcopy show high grade cell changes. LLETZ is carried out using a wire loop which removes the abnormal cells. Instead of looking at the cervix with the naked eye, your specialist nurse or doctor (colposcopist) will use a colposcope to see changes to your cervix at high magnification.

A colposcope is a special microscope that allows a more detailed look at the cervix. It stays outside of your body; all that goes inside is the speculum. The speculum is the instrument your GP or practice nurse used to see your cervix when taking your cervical screening. You will be asked to go to a colposcopy clinic to receive your LLETZ treatment.

Some clinics perform LLETZ, if it is needed, during the first colposcopy appointment; this is called 'see and treat'. Other clinics will ask the patient to attend colposcopy, take a biopsy and then call the patient back for a separate appointment to have the LLETZ treatment. You will be informed before the clinic visit if treatment will be offered at the first colposcopy appointment.

What happens during LLETZ?

LLETZ is performed in a colposcopy clinic so you will be seen as an out-patient. LLETZ will usually not be performed if you have your period, but do check with your clinic if you have any concerns. The procedure should take about five minutes and is carried out under local anaesthetic. You may be asked to sign a consent form prior to treatment. If you feel concerned before or during the procedure do not hesitate to ask your colposcopist or clinic nurse for guidance or reassurance.

Most colposcopy clinics have a chair specially designed for colposcopy examinations. You will be asked to sit in the chair and your legs will be positioned on leg rests, the chair is then tilted backwards. Your colposcopist will then place a speculum inside your vagina so that they can see your cervix. They will then examine your cervix using a colposcope. In many clinics, you may watch the assessment (if you wish to) on a TV screen that is by your side.

During the examination the colposcopist may apply different solutions to the cervix; usually acetic acid (concentrated vinegar solution) or iodine. These solutions highlight the abnormal area(s) to be removed. Once these areas have been identified your colposcopist will inject a local anaesthetic into your cervix, using a very thin needle.

Every individual reacts differently and for some your LLETZ treatment can be a little uncomfortable. If there is still pain being felt or continued discomfort then further local anaesthetic may be administered. You must tell the colposcopist if you feel any pain.

Once the area is sufficiently numb the colposcopist will remove the abnormal area(s) with the wire loop. The loop is used to remove the abnormal tissue, usually in one piece. The area is then treated to seal any bleeding blood vessels. This should not be painful;

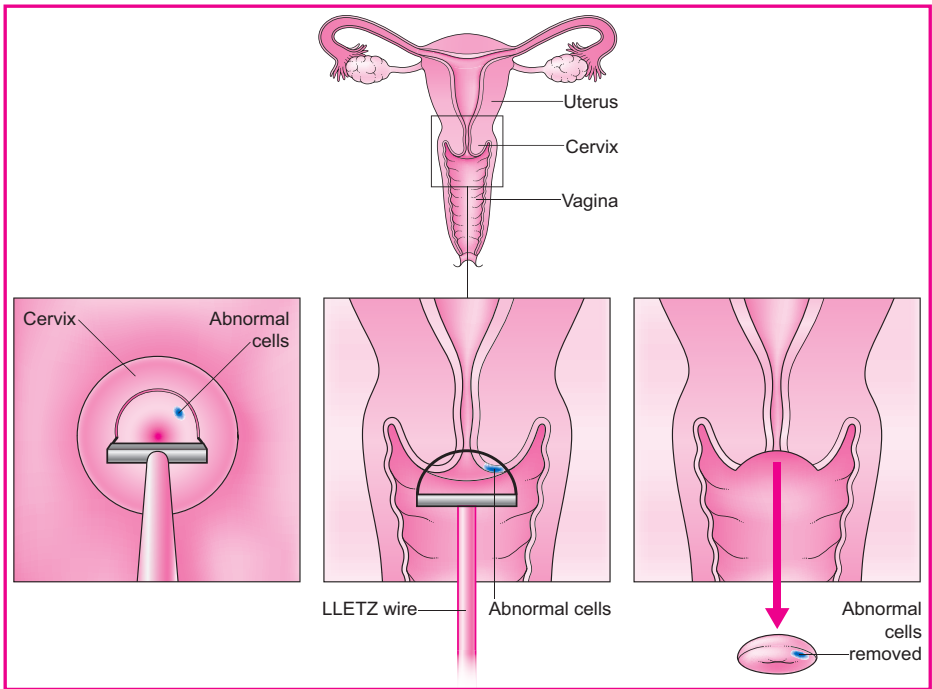


Figure 1. Diagram of the removal of an area of abnormal cells using LLETZ

however, some women can feel a degree of discomfort, usually in the form of pressure or an abdominal ache, often described as similar to period pains. Some women find their legs shake or they feel as if their pulse is racing as the treatment happens, this can happen if the local anaesthetic used has a tiny dose of adrenaline in it. This is an entirely normal and harmless reaction to the injection and it should stop after the treatment finishes. If you feel uncomfortable during the treatment do tell your colposcopist.

Pain relief can be given if discomfort persists. It is useful to have some pain relief medication (such as you would take for period pains) in case you need to take some when you are at home. Some staining from the iodine or light bleeding from the treatment can be experienced immediately afterwards – this should not be heavy and the nurse will give you a panty liner to wear for your protection (you can also bring your own).

The removed tissue is sent to a laboratory for microscopic examination. The result will not be available immediately. The pathologist will report on the type of abnormality present in the loop specimen.

You and your GP will receive a letter letting you know the results of the microscopic examination. Do check with your colposcopist or clinic nurse the length of time you will need to wait between having the LLETZ and receiving the letter.

LLETZ has been shown to be associated with a small increased risk of pre-term delivery and low birth weight in subsequent pregnancies for those who have had larger areas of cell changes removed or more than one LLETZ procedure. However, this very small risk is more than outweighed by the benefits of removing the abnormal cells from your cervix, which, if left untreated, are at risk of developing into cancer in the future.

Will I feel OK after LLETZ?

Everyone is different; some women attend their appointments alone, have the treatment, feel OK and either return to work or go home. Others feel more reassured by bringing a family member or friend with them who can drive them home. Some women can feel 'washed out' or tender afterwards and need more time to recover.

What is important is that you do what is best for you to achieve a full recovery. Some colposcopists advise their patients to take the day off and if they are feeling nervous or anxious about the treatment to take someone with them. The majority of women feel well enough to return to work the following day but some do not and need another day or two to recover.

This procedure can seem daunting to many women, but in the majority of cases it is quick, easy and painless. However, if you are feeling scared or nervous about it you can seek further support

and information by calling the Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust Helpline: **0808 802 8000** or by visiting our forum: www.jostrust.org.uk/forum.

What can I do or not do after LLETZ?

The healing process following LLETZ can differ from person to person. A vaginal discharge is usual for some weeks following treatment and is part of the healing process. It should stop or return to 'normal' as soon as the cervix is healed. You will be advised to refrain from sexual intercourse and using tampons for four weeks, as well not going for a swim for two to three weeks until the vaginal discharge is getting better. Some women also notice a change in their first few periods after treatment (they can be heavier or lighter than usual, or irregular).

If the vaginal discharge persists, becomes heavier or has an offensive smell then you should see your GP. The GP can check for any signs of infection and that healing is progressing. Occasionally antibiotics are prescribed to assist the healing process.

Follow-up treatment after LLETZ treatment

It is extremely important that you attend your follow-up appointment as advised by your local service after your LLETZ procedure. Six months after your treatment you will be called back to have a repeat cervical screening test – this will usually be done at your GP surgery. In most parts of the UK an HPV test is included as part of this screening test.

These follow-up tests help to identify if the LLETZ treatment has been successful, the abnormal cervical cells have been removed and the area is now normal. If the results are abnormal, you may be recalled to colposcopy. At the recall appointment, your colposcopist will let you know if you need any further check ups.

We also have information on:

- Cervical screening
- Cervical cancer
- HPV
- HPV testing
- HPV vaccine

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The information included in this publication was correct at the time of going to press. We plan to review publications every few years however updates may happen more frequently. For updates or for the latest information, visit jostrust.org.uk.



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